

Chapter 2. Expanding Educational Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

Increasing Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The President has delivered on his promise in the New Freedom Initiative to increase funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which requires that eligible students with disabilities be provided a free appropriate public education.

Accomplishments

- Since FY 2001, the President has obtained more than \$3.7 billion in additional annual funding for the IDEA Part B State Grants program. In FY 2004, nearly \$10.1 billion are available for this program, which represents an increase of 59% since 2001.

Next Steps

- The President's FY 2005 budget proposal includes another \$1 billion increase for the IDEA Part B State Grants program.

President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education

Executive Order 13227, issued on October 2, 2001, created the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education and charged the Commission with collecting information, studying issues related to Federal, state and local programs, and recommending policies for improving the educational performance of students with disabilities. The Commission, which was chaired by former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, held thirteen public hearings in cities nationwide and considered the views of hundreds of experts in the field of education, parents of children with disabilities, and individuals with disabilities themselves.

The Commission submitted its final report to the President on July 1, 2002. The report, entitled *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families*, <http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionsboards/whspecialeducation/reports/index.html>, presents the following broad recommendations:

1. Focus on results -- not on process. While IDEA must retain the legal and procedural safeguards necessary to guarantee a "free appropriate public education" for children with disabilities, it will only fulfill its intended purpose by raising expectations for students and becoming more results-oriented, rather than driven by process, litigation, regulation, and confrontation.
2. Embrace a model of prevention, not a model of failure. Reforms must move the system toward early identification and swift intervention, using scientifically based instruction and teaching methods. This will require changes in the Nation's elementary and secondary schools, as well as reforms in teacher preparation, recruitment, and support.
3. Consider children with disabilities as general education children first. Special education should not be treated as a separate cost system, and evaluations of spending must be

based on all child expenditures, including funds from general education. Funding arrangements should not create an incentive for special education identification or become an option for isolating children with learning and behavior problems. Flexibility in the use of all educational funds, including those provided through IDEA, is essential.

Improving Educational Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

The Department of Education, sometimes in collaboration with other Federal agencies, funds numerous studies aimed at improving educational outcomes for individuals with disabilities. The New Freedom Initiative and the recommendations of the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education have shaped recent funding priorities, as the following notable projects demonstrate.

Accomplishments

- In September 2003, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services funded eight research projects to explore the effectiveness of curriculum interventions or programs in preparing at-risk children for school. The projects have an emphasis on early reading intervention curriculum research and evaluation.
- In September 2002, the Office of Special Education Programs at the Department of Education supplemented the National Center on Accessing the General Curriculum at the Center for Applied Special Technology, Inc. (CAST), to define voluntary accessibility standards that would increase the quality and timely availability of accessible versions of print textbooks to PreK-12 students with disabilities (e.g., Braille textbooks for students who are blind). A forty-member National File Format (NFF) Technical Panel, representing educators, publishers, technology specialists, and advocacy groups, achieved consensus on a set of standards. It is anticipated that the Panel's finding and recommendations will be made public in the very near future. The NFF Panel work is documented at <http://www.cast.org/nff>.
- Newly funded in FY 2003 by the Department of Education, the National Drop-Out Prevention Center for Youth with Disabilities at Clemson University aims to increase rates of school completion by students with disabilities, emphasizing drop-out prevention for enrolled students and re-entry into education by students who have dropped out of school.
- In July 2003, the Department of Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration announced a funding priority to focus attention on the adult literacy needs of individuals with learning disabilities pursuing employment under the state vocational rehabilitation services program. Projects supported under this priority will demonstrate whether certain specific literacy services may raise the literacy levels and earnings of individuals with disabilities.
- The Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services have formed a partnership to support research to enhance literacy and employment skills of young American adults. Three research grants were awarded in FY 2003.
- The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs recently funded two centers related to student progress monitoring, an underutilized, scientifically-based practice that helps teachers better target instruction to enhance student learning.

- The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs funds a set of directed projects that pursue a systematic program of research designed to increase our understanding of access to the general education curriculum for students with significant cognitive disabilities.

Youth Transition

As the New Freedom Initiative results in better educational opportunities and outcomes for more people with disabilities, it is critical that efforts are undertaken to promote the successful transition of youth to post-secondary school, work, and other goals. The Administration supports this transition in a number of ways, including through programs that promote mentoring.

Accomplishments

- As a result of a collaborative effort between the Department of Labor and the Department of Education, over \$880,000 was awarded in 2003 to six faith-based and community intermediary organizations to help build the capacity and knowledge of faith-based and community organizations to provide mentoring services to young people with disabilities.
- In March 2003, the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services began an initiative with the Mitsubishi Electric America Foundation. The purpose of the partnership was to convene Federal agencies and foundations active in funding programs for youth with disabilities to explore working cooperatively, leveraging resources and expertise, jointly identifying priority goals, and cultivating projects to improve outcomes for youth with disabilities.
- A set of model projects being funded by the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services demonstrate new or improved approaches to participation and successful interagency collaboration in planning for the transition of youth with disabilities from school to post-school goals and objectives like post-secondary education or training, employment, independent living, and community participation.
- In September 2003, the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services partnered with the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), to sponsor a National Leadership Summit in collaboration with fifteen Federal agencies and national organizations. The purpose of the national summit was to provide a forum for states to increase their capacity to work collaboratively on the issues of improved outcomes for youth with disabilities. A coordinated technical assistance plan based on the work of the summit is being developed to help guide technical assistance strategies targeted to state needs.
- The Partnerships for Effective Youth Transitions is a set of model projects that demonstrates the development of comprehensive services systems designed to meet unique developmental needs of transitioning youth with a serious emotional disturbance and/or emerging mental illness and their families. Model projects are currently being funded in Pennsylvania, Maine, Minnesota, Utah, and Washington. This is a collaborative effort between the Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Mental Health Services and the Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services.

- In November 2003, the Department of Health and Human Services' Family and Youth Services Bureau hosted the Second National Youth Summit, which included sessions on transition issues for youth with disabilities. This Summit drew approximately 1,200 participants, including 300 youth leaders. Sessions included information on youth with disabilities making a successful transition to employment and lifelong learning, and highlighted particular youth development projects.
- Since 2001, the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy has hosted Disability Mentoring Day, in collaboration with the American Association of People with Disabilities and corporate sponsors. On October 15, 2003, almost 7,000 young people from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico spent the day in hundreds of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government institutions. In addition, Disability Mentoring Day expanded its international reach with celebrations in Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Kenya, Kosovo, New Zealand, Nigeria, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
- In 2003, the Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy provided approximately \$6.3 million in new grant monies to support workforce development systems change projects geared toward improving transition results for youth with disabilities through the incorporation of evidence-based design features into the system of youth service delivery.
- In FY 2003, the Social Security Administration provided more than \$5 million in grants to selected states to improve the way services are provided for youth transitioning from high school into adult life. The project involves coordination of state and Federal resources and targets individuals ages 14 to 25 who receive Supplemental Security Income benefits. The President has secured \$10.2 million for this project in FY 2004 and has requested \$9.9 million for FY 2005.